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CHAIRMAN BUYER OPENING STATEMENT RECRUITING HEARING

Today, the Subcommittee turns its attention to recruiting.

There is no question that the services face an incredibly difficult recruiting environment. The lowest unemployment rate since the creation of the all volunteer force, higher college enrollments, and reduced awareness of the advantages of military service have contributed to a decline in the inclination for America's youth to choose the military as their first employer. The strong economy that is bestowing so many blessings on our nation is simply producing too many attractive options for our young people. As a result, the military must work very hard to remain competitive.

The purpose of today's hearing is to explore ways to deal with the reality that the military is not keeping up with the competition. The Army and the Air Force are both projecting failed recruiting years in fiscal year 1999 and are expecting to violate the law by coming in under the end strength floors set by Congress. After a disastrous recruiting year in fiscal year 1998, the Navy is recovering but still not confident that the recruiting mission will be achieved. Marine Corps recruiting is still on track, but their people are paying a very high price for success.

The services have responded to the challenge in two primary ways:

1. The services, DOD, and the Congress have added \$300 million to recruiting accounts in two years. The problem is that the money was applied inconsistently and often too late to be of maximum utility.
2. And the services have reduced recruit quality standards. The Army and the Navy decided to simply cut quality standards, and the Air Force and Marine Corps have accessed increasingly fewer quality recruits.

Although DOD's policy is to not trade quality for quantity, the Secretary of the Army has been calling for further cuts to quality standards to levels below those DOD has established as minimally acceptable to sustain a ready force.

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I believe that further reductions to recruit quality standards present a very costly and dangerous risk to military readiness that must be avoided. I recognize that there must be some balance between quality and funding for recruiting, but I still remember the emphatic testimony of NCOs during this Subcommittee's field hearing in Norfolk, Virginia. Those NCOs strongly believed that recruit quality had dropped to dangerous levels and they asked the Subcommittee to not allow recruit quality to be decreased further.

I must tell you that I feel an obligation to support those hardworking NCOs. It is a heartfelt obligation on my part because I, like those NCOs, believe that quality recruits are essential to maintaining the warrior ethos so essential to combat readiness.

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